

Unique fauna of Aruba



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From Kyiv to Canvas: How Utah's Olha Svieshnikova is turning refugee resilience into international art success

On the outskirts of Salt Lake City, Utah, inside a quiet home that now serves as both a sanctuary and a studio, Olha Svieshnikova stands before a canvas. The colors she chooses are vibrant—deep blues, fiery oranges, and earthy greens—a stark contrast to the gray, smoke-filled morning in 2022 that redefined her life.

Svieshnikova is one of millions who fled Ukraine following the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022. But today, her name is becoming synonymous not just with survival, but with a flourishing artistic career that is supporting her family and giving back to the community that welcomed her.

A Morning of "Mushrooms" For Svieshnikova, the war didn't start with a news broadcast; it started with a sound that shattered the silence of her home near Kyiv. "I opened the window, and I saw what looked like large mushrooms," she recalled in a recent interview with ABC4 Utah. Those "mushrooms" were the plumes of smoke from falling bombs.



In an instant, her life as she knew it was over. Acting on pure instinct, she grabbed her elderly mother and her then-young son, and they sought shelter in their hallway, lining the walls with mattresses to protect themselves from shattering glass. After four days of barricading themselves while military bases just two miles away were targeted, the family made the harrowing decision to leave everything behind.

Finding a New Rhythm in Utah

Fast forward four years, and the Svieshnikova family has built a new life in the United States.

Residing in Utah, Olha has transitioned from a refugee seeking safety to a professional artist with a growing national presence. As the sole caretaker for both her mother and her 10-year-old son, the pressure to provide was immense. She turned to the one thing that has been her constant throughout her life: her art. "I have been painting all my life," she says. "When I have time, I am always painting... painting is my life, this is my world".

Her work is deeply intuitive, often guided by her mood and emotions rather than a rigid plan. This raw, energetic style has caught the eye of the American art world.

According to News-Nation, she has already attracted the attention of several galleries across the U.S. and was even invited to participate in an international exhibit in Lisbon, Portugal.

Art as a Bridge

Svieshnikova's success isn't just about personal gain. She views her talent as a way to express her profound gratitude to the country she says saved her family. "The United States saved me, my mom, and my son," she told reporters. "I want to contribute to this

state because I am grateful".

Her contributions are tangible. A portion of the earnings from her painting sales is sent back to her home country to support children affected by the ongoing conflict. In doing so, she has turned her personal passion into a bridge between her new home in Utah and the country she was forced to leave behind.

A Legacy of Resilience

The former president of the Utah Valley Artist Guild has praised Svieshnikova not just for her technical skill, but for the "energy" she brings to her canvases. Her story is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit. While many would be paralyzed by the trauma of war and the challenges of starting over in a foreign land, Svieshnikova has used her experiences to fuel her creativity.

Today, as she works in her Utah studio, the sound of bombs has been replaced by the quiet scratch of a brush against canvas. Her "world," once shattered by conflict, has been painstakingly rebuilt, one color at a time. □

Workplace equality exists nowhere: World Bank

Washington, United States Full workplace equality does not exist anywhere in the world and only a tiny fraction of women live in countries with a labor market that comes close to it, the World Bank said Tuesday.

Even when workplace equality laws are passed by lawmakers they are truly enforced in only about half of all cases, the bank said in a report on women, business and the law.

"Even in economies that have modernized their laws, women still face constraints that shape the work they can do, the businesses they can start, and the safety they need to pursue opportunities," said Indermit Gill, the lender's chief economist.

The report assesses not only



This picture taken on October 9, 2018 shows International Monetary Fund chief Christine Lagarde (2L) with Carolyn Wilkins (R), Canada's Senior Deputy Governor, Priyanti Fernando (2R), Executive Director of the International Women's Rights Action Watch and Vera Songwe (3R), Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, listen as Indonesian Finance Minister Mulyani Indrawati (3L) speaks during a forum "Empowering Women in the Workplace", prior to the start of the IMF/WB Annual meetings in Nusa Dua, on Indonesia's resort island of Bali on October 12, 2018.

equality laws that have been passed but also public services created to help women in the workplace

and ensure these laws are enforced.

The bank insisted that reforms are needed because 1.2 billion young people -- half of them women -- will enter the workplace over the next decade.

"Many will come of age in regions where women face the biggest barriers, and where the GDP boost that would result from their participation is most needed," said Tea Trumbic, the report's lead author.

And ensuring equal workplace access for women benefits not just them but society in general, the report argued.

Indeed, in countries where women have more opportunities, men's rate of labor force participation is also higher, the report says.

Advanced-economy countries have conditions most closely resembling equality, with Spain at the top, this report says. Countries in the Middle East and Pacific lag far behind.

The most significant progress in reducing the workplace equality gap came in low-income and developing countries such as Egypt, Madagascar or Somalia.

In these nations efforts were made to ease restrictions on women entering certain fields, institute equal pay for equal work and allow parental leave.

Altogether nearly 70 countries approved around 100 reforms from 2023 to 2025 seeking to give women more access to the job market and business world. □

U.S. eases ban on Venezuelan oil to Cuba as crisis alarms

Basseterre, Saint Kitts and Nevis

The United States on Wednesday eased its ban on Venezuelan oil exports to Cuba after the communist-run island plunged into an economic crisis, which Caribbean leaders warned could bring instability to the region.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, a Cuban-American from Florida who has spent his political career hoping to topple Havana's government, attended a summit of the Caribbean Community where he staunchly defended the January 3 US attack that deposed Venezuela's leftist leader Nicolas Maduro.

As Rubio held the talks in the tiny island nation of Saint Kitts and Nevis, Cuba's coastguard shot dead four people on a speedboat registered in the US state of Florida.

The Cuban interior ministry said the boat was "illegal" and that shots were fired from it first. The United States did not have immediate comment.

Cuba's economy has been in freefall since the United States snatched Maduro and forced Venezuela to stop oil shipments to the is-



land, which relied on its left ally for half its fuel needs. The Treasury Department said Thursday that the United States would allow "transactions that support the Cuban people" that include Venezuelan oil for "commercial and humanitarian use."

To qualify, the exports would need to go through private businesses and not the vast government or military apparatus in the communist state.

- Warnings on crisis -
Speaking at the opening of

the CARICOM summit on Tuesday, Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness warned that a further deterioration in Cuba would impact stability across the Caribbean and trigger migration -- Trump's top political concern.

"Humanitarian suffering serves no one," Holness said. "A prolonged crisis in Cuba will not remain confined to Cuba."

Holness called for "constructive dialogue between Cuba and the United States aimed at de-escalation, reform and stability."

Canada, which has long broken with its southern neighbor by maintaining warm relations with Havana, announced Can\$8 million (\$5.8 million) in aid for Cuba, which has experienced rolling blackouts and acute fuel shortages.

The Caribbean summit's host, Saint Kitts and Nevis Prime Minister Terrence Drew, studied in Cuba to be a doctor and said friends have told him of food scarcity and garbage strewn in the streets.

"A destabilized Cuba will

destabilize all of us," Drew said.

The United States has maintained an embargo on Cuba almost continuously since Fidel Castro's 1959 communist revolution.

Since becoming the top US diplomat, Rubio has publicly toned down calls for regime change and Trump has held off on further measures pushed by Cuban-American hardline critics of Havana, such as prohibiting the transfer of remittances.

- 'Without apology' on Venezuela -

Addressing the summit, Rubio staunchly defended the deadly operation that seized Maduro, saying that Venezuela has made "substantial" progress since then.

"I will tell you this without any apology or without any apprehension: Venezuela is better off today than it was eight weeks ago," Rubio said.

Rubio said he believed Venezuela had moved to a new phase and that there was a need for "fair, democratic elections," although he did not lay out a timetable. □

Mike Tyson, healthy eating advocate for Trump administration

Washington, United States
Boxing legend Mike Tyson, who tasted both glory and prison in a roller-coaster life and career, spoke out Wednesday about his new role as a healthy-eating ambassador for the Trump administration.

The former heavyweight champ has lent his face to an ad campaign with the slogan "Eat Real Food," as opposed to ultra-processed products that are popular in America. An ad generated by the campaign aired Sunday during the Super Bowl.

"This is the biggest fight of my life," Tyson said Wednesday at an event with US Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

In the new black and white commercial, Tyson, 59, re-



Mike Tyson, healthy eating advocate for Trump administration

calls that his sister Denise suffered from obesity and died of a heart attack at age 25.

He recounts a tough childhood battling his own weight issues, eating junk food all the time and

weighing as much as 345 pounds (156 kilograms).

"I had so much self-hate," Tyson says in the ad. "I just wanted to kill myself."

"Where I come from is Brownsville, Brooklyn. It's the most violent, poverty-

struck neighborhood in the city of New York. And ultra-processed food was just the norm," Tyson said at the event with Kennedy, whose slogan is "Make America Healthy Again."

Americans consume a diet heavy in calories that come from ultra-processed foods and are among the world's worst offenders in this category, according to government figures.

Eating food rich in sugar, fat, salt and preservatives is associated with a higher risk of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular problems. Among a blizzard of changes to US health policy including de-emphasizing vaccines, Kennedy last month flipped the American food pyramid upside down to encourage peo-

ple to eat meat and whole-milk dairy products.

Fiber-rich whole grains like oats are now at the bottom of the chart.

Critics have raised concerns that this change might be a result of lobbying from the agriculture sector.

Tyson became the undisputed heavyweight boxing champion in the 1980s, terrifying his opponents with his fury in the ring and a phenomenal punching power.

But he spent three years in jail beginning in 1992 after being found guilty of raping model Desiree Washington, who was 18 at the time.

In a notorious 1996 match-up, Tyson bit off a piece of his opponent Evander Holyfield's ear. □

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This photo taken on January 30, 2026 shows a gallery assistant posing with 'Rey and Luke Skywalker's Hero Lightsaber' from the 2015 movie "Star Wars: The Force Awakens", at a preview by memorabilia auction house Propstore in Rickmansworth, near London.

'Jaws' harpoon gun and 'Star Wars' treasures lead L.A. film and TV auction

Los Angeles, United States
A harpoon gun from "Jaws," a jacket worn by "The Terminator," and a "Star Wars" lightsaber hilt and C-3PO head are among the eye-catching items to be sold at auction next month. The collection of around 1,550 pieces of film and TV history will go under the hammer over three days from March 25, with in-room bidding on the first day only at the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles. From props to costumes, a selection of the memorabilia will also go on show for a day on March 11 -- at The Maybourne Beverly Hills hotel.

The lots, which also include the so-called Marauder's Map from the "Harry Potter" films, have a combined pre-sale estimate of \$9 million, according to Propstore, the auctioneers staging the sale. It noted that buyers from

around the world, who increasingly utilise online bidding, were forging a new global collectors market. "We're seeing 20 to 30 per cent more engagement, more registration, more people bidding," Ibrahim Faraj, Propstore's UK consignments manager, explained at a media preview of some British-based items before they headed to California. "It's growing bigger and it's the new, modern thing people are collecting now."

- 'Star Wars history' -

The fibreglass C-3PO head worn by "Star Wars" stalwart Anthony Daniels in "The Empire Strikes Back" (1980) is near the top of the pricing charts, with an estimate of \$350,000 to \$700,000. Featuring illuminated eyes in the film, and with original wiring in the right socket, this particular C-3PO head boasts several unique features including a forehead

antenna. "These things rarely come up... so it's quite exciting," Faraj said. Another "Star Wars" piece of memorabilia on offer is the lightsaber hilt from "The Force Awakens," which is valued at up to \$100,000. "This is no ordinary lightsaber," he noted, branding it "the Skywalker" version as it was used by Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) and Rey (Daisy Ridley). They rediscover it in the 2015 installment after prior generations wield it -- albeit another model -- in earlier franchise films. "It's arguably one of the most important pieces in 'Star Wars' history," Faraj argued.

- 'Absolutely brilliant' -

The harpoon gun wielded by Quint (Robert Shaw) and Matt Hooper (Richard Dreyfuss) in Steven Spielberg's 1975 favourite "Jaws" is expected to generate similar buzz. □

NASA Veteran Mike Fincke Reports "Positive Outcome" After Historic Medical Evacuation

HOUSTON — NASA astronaut Mike Fincke, 58, revealed on Wednesday that he was the crew member whose health concern prompted the first-ever medical evacuation in the history of the International Space Station (ISS). In a statement released by NASA, Fincke confirmed he is "doing very well" and is currently undergoing standard post-flight reconditioning at the Johnson Space Center.

The Orbital Incident

The "medical event" occurred on January 7, 2026, while Fincke was serving as the commander of Expedition 74. The situation required immediate attention from his crewmates and guidance from flight surgeons on the ground. While Fincke's condition stabilized quickly, NASA leadership determined that an early return for the entire SpaceX Crew-11 was the safest course of action.

The decision was driven by the need for advanced medical imaging such as high-resolution MRI or CT scans which are not currently available aboard the orbiting laboratory. This forced the cancellation of a planned spacewalk by Fincke and astronaut Zena Cardman, which was intended to prepare the station for new solar arrays.

A Dramatic Return to Earth

On January 15, 2026, the SpaceX Dragon Endeavour splashed down off the coast of San Diego. After being recovered from the capsule, all four astronauts Fincke, Cardman, Japan's Kimiya Yui, and Roscosmos cosmonaut Oleg Platonov were transported to Scripps Memorial Hospital La Jolla for evaluation. □



NASA astronaut Mike Fincke departs the Neil A. Armstrong Operations and Control Building at the Kennedy Space Center for Space Launch Complex 39A before the NASA and SpaceX Launch Crew-11 mission to the International Space Station on July 31, 2025 in Cape Canaveral, Florida.

Alexandria bids farewell to historic tram in latest urban upheaval

Alexandria, Egypt

Along Egypt's Mediterranean coast, the oldest tram in Africa and the Middle East rumbles for a final few weeks before its removal the latest urban upheaval Alexandrians say is hollowing out their city's identity. Government plans to replace the colourful streetcars on one of the city's routes with a partially elevated light rail line have angered Alexandrians, for whom the 163-year-old track is "heritage, not just a means of transport", local urban researcher Nahla Saleh told AFP.

Inaugurated in 1863, the tram is one of the world's oldest, and among only a few to operate double-deckercars.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, it helped the city become a bustling metropolis, home to sizable European diasporas and a distinct cosmopolitan culture.

Now, Egyptians young and old have flocked for farewell rides, before the streetcars come to a halt in April. As one locomotive screeches into the old El-Raml Station, commuters and visitors crane their necks out of giant windows at the historic neo-Venetian buildings overhead.

"We're not against progress," psychologist and writer on culture Mona Lam-



Commuters walk along the platform at a tram station in the coastal city of Alexandria on February 18, 2026.

loum told AFP.

She and other Alexandrians agree the tramway needs work: inside the hand-calligraphied blue exterior, grime covers every surface. Underfoot, the rubber flooring is torn and strewn with trash.

"We just have bad experiences of everything they call 'progress' becoming synonymous with destruction," Lambloum said.

In recent years, development projects in Egypt's second city have razed historic parks and most egregiously to locals privatised and obstructed much of its Mediterranean coastline.

- Heart of Alexandria -

For over 160 years, the tram has cut through Alexandria's heart, in an 11-kilometre stretch that includes many of the city's schools and main universities.

The new project, led by Egyptian and international companies including Sysstra, Hyundai and Hitachi, promises to double speed and triple capacity.

Over half of it will be elevated a major concern for Alexandrians who fear the tree-lined track will be replaced by eyesore concrete stilts.

Ahead of the first phase of suspension, the transport

ministry said the new project was the "only solution to the city's traffic problems". Locals like Saleh and Lambloum disagree, saying government plans are making the city more car-dependent and worsening traffic. Already, because so many students rely on the tram, the city has staggered school and university hours to pick up the slack of the partial shutdown.

"Traffic's getting worse, people can't get anywhere, when we've already lost the inner-city train," said Saleh, referring to another project under construction

for the past two years, the new Alexandria Metro Line. "Besides, it being slow was always an advantage," she added, making it safe for "the most vulnerable in society: children and the elderly".

Retired science teacher Hisham Abdelwahab, 64, has been riding the tram since he was a child.

"I don't want it to go fast, I like watching the world go by," he told AFP on a station bench.

"Our parents never thought twice about sending us out on the tram alone. Now I have a car, I just like leaving it parked to come ride the tram." When the next streetcar rolls in, the upper deck fills with a gaggle of schoolgirls, squabbling over who gets the window seat closest to the sea breeze.

- The old tram and the sea -

"This tram is our heritage," Abdelwahab said, his sentiment shared by those several decades younger.

Engineering student Mahmoud Bassam, 24, has visited Alexandria just to ride the streetcar "since our tram in Cairo was removed", he told AFP.

With a controversial slew of bridges and widened streets completed in 2020, Cairo's historic Helipolis neighbourhood lost its last tram tracks, along with many of its trees. □

South Korea birth rate jumps but still under key fertility threshold

Seoul, South Korea

South Korea has recorded its biggest annual birth rate bump in 15 years, official figures showed Wednesday, but still far below the threshold needed to stop its population shrinking.

The country has one of the lowest birth rates in the world, pouring billions of dollars into efforts to encourage citizens to have more babies.

Yearly births rose more than six percent between 2024 and 2025, South Korea's Ministry of Data and Statistics said, the sharpest year-on-year rise since 2010.

It was the second year running that the birth rate had increased.

A major factor was the increasing number of South Koreans getting married, said official Park Hyunjeong.

"The number of marriages gained ground for 21 straight months from April 2024 to December last year as couples who had delayed their marriages due to the Covid-19 pandemic tied the knot," Park told reporters.

Single parenthood remains stigmatised in South Korea, leading most people to have children only within

marriage.

South Korea's fertility rate -- or the number of children each woman will have on average -- has ticked up slightly from 0.75 to 0.8.

That is well below the 2.1 threshold needed just to maintain South Korea's current population of 51 million.

Experts say there are multiple reasons for South Korea's low birth rate, from high child-rearing costs to a notoriously competitive society that makes well-paid jobs difficult to secure. The double burden for working mothers of managing the brunt of household chores and childcare

while also maintaining their careers is another key factor, they say.

Seoul has offered cash

handouts, childcare support and infertility treatment aid to address the issue. □



South Korea's President Lee Jae Myung speaks during a joint press conference with Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva after their meeting at the presidential Blue House in Seoul on February 23, 2026.

Bejart Ballet's iconic Bolero ignites Istanbul

Istanbul, Turkey

Thirty-six dancers with raised arms glide slowly forward as they encircle their prey, a lone figure on a red table in a climactic scene from Ravel's "Bolero" choreographed by Maurice Bejart.

Marked by its stark staging and ritualistic intensity, the work remains one of the most enduring interpretations of Ravel's best-known work and continues to captivate audiences worldwide.

Once again, the Bejart Ballet Lausanne (BBL) which was in Istanbul to kick off a new international tour -- closed each of its four performances with the monumental "Bolero."

The 15-minute orchestral piece has inspired seven different choreographies, but is most widely associated with the version created by Bejart, which remains the best known.

"We call it a table, but it could be an altar or a pyre," Julien Favreau, BBL's artistic director, told AFP as he contemplated the 4.5-metre-diameter red structure which folds up like a camping table so it can travel around the world.



Dancers from 'Bejart Ballet Lausanne' (BBL) of Switzerland perform French composer Maurice Ravel's "Bolero", choreographed by Maurice Bejart, as part of the three unique ballets brought together at Zorlu Performing Arts Center (PSM) in Istanbul on February 21, 2026.

Favreau, who joined the BBL at the age of 17, danced his last Bolero in June 2024 in Tokyo, just before taking over the reins of the company, aged 47.

In his experience, performing this work meant everything.

"For a dancer, it is the ultimate achievement, the crowning glory," he said.

- Challenges -

But the work is very demanding.

"The main difficulty is respecting the score's crescendo and keeping your energy and strength intact until the big leaps, when your legs start to bum," he said.

Memorising the choreography without being able to rely on variations in the music whose melody and rhythmic pattern hardly changes is another challenge.

"Some people ask for a teleprompter that displays

the ballet sequences, but not at the BBL" he laughs. Towards the end, the whole body of dancers becomes engaged, menacing as they approach, their tense stomachs flexing as if hungry.

"According to Maurice Bejart's interpretation, the soloist represents the melody who knows from the outset he's going to die," explained Favreau, who speaks of the figure being

"slain", the dancers acting like a "deadly jaw" that closes in.

Created in 1961 for a female soloist, it was later adapted in 1979 for the Argentine star dancer Jorge Donn, Bejart's partner.

Today, the role is played by a woman, with performances rotating between three different performers although a male dancer is expected to join them soon.

He will join an illustrious lineup that includes the late French ballet legend Patrick Dupont, former Paris Opera star Nicolas Le Riche and its current star, Hugo Marchand.

"The main thing is ultimately to show who you are," said Favreau.

- 'Oskar': A new work -

Also on Swiss ballet troupe's Istanbul programme was another classic Bejart interpretation of Stravinsky's "Firebird" but the performance opened with a new work: "Oskar".

Performed for the first time abroad, it is a frenzied work choreographed by Italian duo Riva & Repele which brings virtually the entire 40-strong ensemble onto stage, dressed in red. □

AI robot monk unveiled in Japan

Tokyo, Japan

Japanese researchers have unveiled a robot monk powered by AI that they say can dispense spiritual advice and maybe one day ease shortages of its human counterparts. Trained on even the most esoteric Buddhist scriptures, the University of Kyoto says the machine can answer sensitive questions that people may feel hesitant to share with other humans.

In addition, "Buddha-roid", as the diminutive two-legged humanoid is known, can offer a sense of presence at religious sanctuaries in addition to voice communications. "In the future, it is conceivable that they may assist with or replace some of

the religious rituals traditionally performed by human monks," the university said in a statement on Wednesday.

The robot is the latest offering from Seiji Kumagai, a professor at the university's Institute for the Future of Human Society.

Using AI models from OpenAI and others, he has worked with engineering firms to develop religious AI chatbots like Buddha Bot and a catechism bot.

For his new creation, Kumagai installed his updated "Buddha Bot Plus" on a Chinese-made "Unitree G1" humanoid robot to create the AI robo-monk.

In a media presentation at a temple on Tuesday, Kumagai presented the robot as yet without a face

wearing a simple grey garment.

It held its gloved hands together in a prayer form and walked around in front of reporters and performed other tasks.

As it sat on a chair, the humanoid gave advice to a young local journalist who confessed to thinking and worrying too much.

"Buddhism teaches that it is important not to blindly follow one's thoughts or rush headlong into things," it said in a soothing baritone to the journalist from national broadcaster NHK.

"One approach is to calm your mind and let go of the thought itself," it said.

Religious chatbots powered by artificial intelligence are already popular tools as well as contentious



A robot participates in an exhibition on the fourth day of the Lunar New Year of the Horse at a mall in Beijing on February 20, 2026.

across all major faiths, used by millions of people. Kyoto already has a non-AI android called Mindar that delivers sermons, and in Germany in 2017 a robot was unveiled with a touchscreen with glowing hands that gave blessings in five languages. But the new machine

brings AI and robotics together, offering spiritual advice and holding religious conversations while also performing human-like physical motions. Kyoto University said that ethical discussions must continue about the proper use of such tools in religious settings. □

The Aruban way of life: Creating community with Cas di Torto



(Oranjestad)—The Aruban people understand that a happy life is spent in great ambience with your loved ones. Passed down from one generation to the other, building community has been a key aspect in forging our traditions and customs. The Cas di Torto (mud house) played a big role in cultivating community, bridging families together and forming close bonds with your neighbors—something we highly value today.

Cas di Torto: History and construction

The origin of the Cas di Torto is said to date back to the early 19th century in the Paragana Peninsula in Venezuela. Refugees who sought sanctuary on Aruba introduced this building method to the island.

The uprights of the walls were made with sturdy and straight wayaca or kwihi wood, or from thin mangrove struts. Then, the wattle walls were weaved in using branches and twigs from the warem and sisal plant, daubed with a mixture of grass and mud. Finally, the walls got a coat

of white plaster to seal everything in.

For roofing, corn stalks, palm fronds and straws were used, allowing air to flow freely through the house. This method of roofing was known throughout the ABC islands (Aruba, Curacao, Bonaire), but the use of corn stalks in Aruba eventually got replaced with use of mud and white plaster for the roofs. The white plaster all around made the houses look like cake, hence the name “Torto” (Spanish for “cake”).

Building community Building Torto houses was often a community effort. Young couples who were about to get married had to have their house built before they could tie the knot and start their own family. This is where the help of the community comes into play.

Neighbors, extended family and friends would all help in the construction of a Torto House. And everyone had a role: The men oversaw the building of the house, and the women



were tasked with collecting wood and straws, cooking and taking care of the little ones.

The couple’s family were primarily responsible for feeding everyone who helped build the house. Before construction, someone usually had the task to prepare the meal; going fishing or slaughter farm animals like goats, chicken or sheep. Even the older kids

had their tasks; the older children of the family usually helped with collecting water and mixing the mud.

The average duration of constructing a Cas di Torto was 4 months.

At the end of a long day of work, everyone would gather around and enjoy a feast of hearty food. This type of help from friends and family became a tradi-

tion and was called “paga lumba”: You help me today; I’ll help you tomorrow.

Nowadays, traditional Cas di Torto are rare, especially those that are still inhabited. Houses that do exist probably date back more than a century.

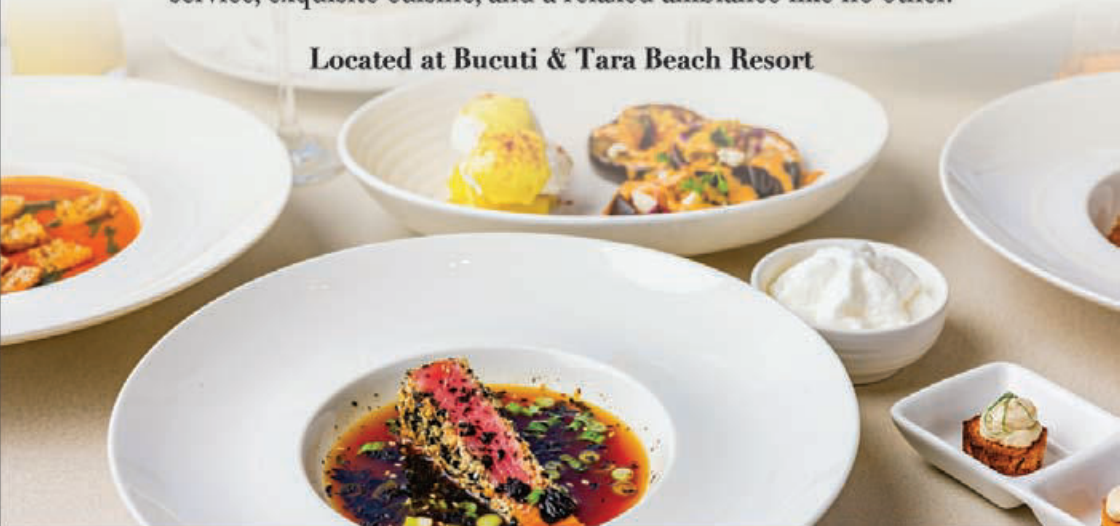
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Adriaan Iaclé: One of Aruba's richest men in the twentieth century

(Oranjestad)—The name Adriaan Iaclé may ring a bell to locals as one of the main roads on the island, but about a century ago, Adriaan Iaclé was a rich businessman, well-known for his generosity, wealth, and taste.

Adriaan was born in 1866 and was the eldest of six children. Not much is known about his childhood upbringing or any of his earlier business ordeals, but during his heyday he often helped people get loans, was a well-established trader, and owned sev-

eral plots of land. In fact, he commissioned the construction of the famous La Quinta Camen manor—now a restaurant. Though he himself never lived in the beautiful manor, his own house also reflected his success and good taste. Today his house still stands in good condition and can be found in the backstreets of main street Oranjestad.

Regarding his personal life, it has been said that he was married twice during his lifetime. He had his first daughter during his first marriage but lost his wife



soon after her birth. During his second marriage, he fathered 16 children. However, it has been said that only 11 of those 17 made

it past 18 years of age. Perhaps two of his most well-known daughters are Maria Monica Iaclé and Maria Veneranda Iaclé,

who went on to marry successful brothers Eloy Arends and Maximilian Arends, respectively. Their houses are still standing; Eloy and Maria Monica's mansion functions as the town hall, used to host civil marriages, while Maximilian and Maria Veneranda's house stands on the opposite side of the road to them—though currently under renovation after years left in ruin.

Source: De Kolibrie op de Rots (en meer over de geschiedenis van Aruba) by Evert Bongers.

Don't miss out on L'Avenue's Early Bird Special!



(Oranjestad)—Up to grab an early dinner after a day of shopping or cruising? Take advantage of L'Avenue's Early Bird Special, and experience their innovative twist of traditional Belgian cuisine!

Located in a cozy nook at The Cove Mall—a short walking distance from the Holiday Inn and Paseo Herencia, this Belgian

and French bistro offers a delicious and rich menu available through lunch and dinner from 11am to 10pm. Enjoy your lunch and/or dinner in a cool, air-conditioned interior area of the restaurant, accompanied by the warm lights and chic design that emphasizes the restaurant's laid-back, yet sophisticated ambience. Lunch includes a variety

of sandwiches—with a healthy selection of bread options—if you're going for a light meal, but just like their dinner selection, also includes steak, chicken, fish, and even mussels and rabbit if you're craving a bit more of L'Avenue's exquisite menu. And let's not forget their wide selection of Belgian beer and European wine to complete the tasty

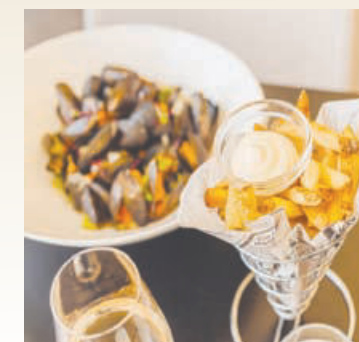
experience!

But that's not all! L'Avenue is offering their guests their Early Bird Special, available every day from 4pm to 7pm. Enjoy this affordable and delectable 3-course meal special at a comfortable price of \$32 per guest, including a glass of house wine.

L'Avenue honors and takes pride in serving the traditional Belgian and French flavors, but does not shy away from offering a flexible menu for their guests' needs. That's right, L'Avenue also offers to cater for their guests' dietary restrictions, making sure that each guest gets well taken care of!

More information

L'Avenue is situated at The Cove Mall in Palm Beach and is open every day from 11am to 10pm for lunch and dinner. To book a reservation or ask for more information, please contact their phone line at +297 6996400, send an e-mail info@lavenuearuba.com, or visit their website at lavenuearuba.com



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Ayo & Casibari: Aruba's famous rock formations

(Oranjestad)—The Ayo and Casibari Rock Formations are known locally as one of the crucial sites to have in your “off-road” trip itinerary. These naturally formed rock formations as just one of the few places on the island that hold a rich history of our culture and of our ancestors.

Ayo

The Ayo Rock Formation is located in the northern part of the island, right on the road that leads you to the Black Stone Beach, and close to the Natural Bridge.



The Ayo is a fenced terrain that consists of several giant boulders, resting neatly on top of or side by side each other, adding gorgeous natural architecture to the surrounding “mondi”*. This

is also one of the few sites to contain prehistoric markings of our indigenous ancestors. The Ayo Rock formation contains stairs that lead you to the top of the highest boulder, offering a breath-taking view of the Aruban backyard. The Ayo is usually quiet, as it is situated farther away from the busier parts of the island. However, this is just another charm of the site: the quiet area and the refreshing breeze offer a sense of comfort and peace.

Casibari

Probably the busier rock formation site, the Casibari is situated more in the center of the island, much closer—and more accessible—to the general public. Just like Ayo, Casibari is a fenced area containing several boulders that lay on top or lean on each other. The best aspect of the Casibari Rock Formation is the accompanying view when you climb up the top of the round, flat bolder. For this position, you can see the majority of the island and the ocean in the south.

Both sites are open free to the public, 24 hours a day. However, unless you are taking a trip with a professional tour guide, there are no guides at the sites to help you climb the rock. So, do be careful when trudging on the boulders, and make sure to befriend any roaming goats you see along the way!

*Mondi: what we call our Aruban wilderness. We don't have forests, or deserts, but we do have mondi!

Papiamento words and phrases you may want to know!

(Oranjestad)—Aruba is a melting pot of different nationalities, cultures and languages. Primarily for this reason, the average Aruban can understand and speak Dutch, English and Spanish relatively well. However, as much as we pride ourselves in being able to communicate with almost everyone, we cherish our native tongue Papiamento above all else. Want to learn some common words in our language? Here are a few basic words and phrases that can get you a hat tip from an Aruban.

When you arrive at the airport in Aruba, one of the first words in Papiamento you may encounter is “Bon bini.” Bon bini in Papiamento means welcome, and is probably the most famous Papiamento word for tourists.

Hi! Bye!

To be fair, there is no unique way to say “hello” in Papiamento—at least not officially. We often just use the English “hello” or “hey”, or Dutch “hallo” to greet someone. We do however, always follow it up with “con bay?” or “con ta?” Con bay is a shortened version of “con ta bay?”, which essentially means “how are you?”

The word “con” in Papiamento means “how?” and is pronounced with a rounder “o” sounds, like in the English word “cone”. “Ta bay” refers to how you are doing.

When we say goodbye, we use the word “ayo” (not like the Ayo Rock Formation, but also...kinda?). We may also use “te oro”, which means “see you later”.

Greetings during the day Most, if not all, languages have different ways to

greet according to the time of day, and Papiamento is no different. Since Papiamento is heavily influenced from Portuguese and Spanish, some of these phrases may look very familiar.

Bondia is used in the morning, up to about noon. Bondia essentially means good morning. The word “bon” means “good”, and while “dia” does not directly mean “morning” in English, it is used often to refer to the morning time.

Bontardi

In the afternoon to early evening hours, we use “bon tardi” to greet people, which means “good afternoon”. “Tardi” actually comes from the word “atardi”, which directly translates to “afternoon”. However, the shortened “tardi” is used to keep the rhythm on the phrase. And the same could be said for our last greeting of the day.



Bonnochi

You guessed it, “bonnochi” means “good night”. Just like “tardi”, “nochi” is actually the shortened version of the word “anochi”.

Yes...no...maybe?

The affirmative and negative expression is very simple in Papiamento. Just like Spanish, our yeses are “si” and our nos are “no”. Pretty easy right? If you want to gain some extra points from younger locals, you can also say “se”, which is a more casual affirmative used mostly by the younger generation.

However, do note: some older generations may find this improper and not respectful, so keep that in mind.

Thanks man...

Lastly, a word that we can also say more often is “danki”, which means literally “thank you”. “Danki” is derived from the Dutch word “bedankt”. Though we don't really have a translation for “I appreciate it” in English, we do use “masha danki” to convey the message. “Masha” means “a lot” or “very”, so “masha danki” means “thank you very much”.

Unique fauna of Aruba

For a small island, Aruba sure has a lot of unique treasures. Among these, we have some subspecies of animals that are unique to our island. These have evolved to perfectly adapt to our desert climate and make Aruba their home. At the same time, they are part of what makes Aruba truly one of a kind.

Cascabel (rattle snake, *Crotalus durissus unicolor*) According to the Arikok National Park, Aruba knows two kinds of snakes, the Santanero and the Cascabel. The cascabel belongs to the rattlesnake family. The cascabel is the only venomous snake from Aruba. It has a length of 65cm to 100cm, and is about 4 to 5cm wide. Its color varies from light brown to grey-brown, and its underbelly is white. On its back there are marks that are a little darker, in the shape of diamonds.

Its reproduction is oviparous, meaning the offspring can hatch from their eggs just before, during or immediately after laying.

The cascabel lives mainly in the Arikok National Park. It likes to live in dark places, and is thus found hidden among the limestone rocks and under stones. As a defense mechanism, the cascabel uses its rattle as a warning, and it is not an aggressive animal.

The cascabel feeds on lizards, small mammals such as rats and mice. It paralyzes or kills its prey with its venom, which is injected through a bite. The enemies of the cascabel are donkeys, goats, humans and cars. Humans are the biggest enemy of the cascabel, as they kill them and destroy their habitat for urbanization.

Shoco (burrowing owl, *Athene cunicularia arubensis*)

The shoco is a small bird which is seldom seen. They are active during the day but are more active later in the day and at night for hunting. These owls have



very good night vision and very good hearing. The shoco is the national symbol of Aruba.

The shoco has about 20cm of length, and the females are slightly heavier than the males. They are light brown in color, with many white spots. The belly of the shoco is either white or light brown, and the shoco has striking yellow eyes. Its beak is yellow/green. Young owls do not have white spots and are lighter in color.

The nest of the shoco is a burrow in the ground. If the shoco cannot find a burrow, it will dig one in soft soil. The shoco lays one or two eggs every other day until all the eggs are laid – a shoco can lay up to four eggs. The first owlets hatch after three to four weeks. The shoco owl takes care of the owlets for three months until they leave the nest. Only a few owlets survive.

The owls dig burrows in the ground with low grass vegetation. An owl can live up to nine years.

Its defense mechanism is simply to fly away or retreat to its burrows. They eat mostly insects, mice and lizards, and the main threats to their survival are boas – an invasive species introduced by humans as pets – and humans through destruction of their habitat.

Prikichi (parakeet, *Araitinga pertinax*)

The Prikichi is the national bird of Aruba. On Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, par-

akeets can be found, but each of the three islands has a different breed. The Yellow-shouldered Amazon parakeet that we have on Aruba is also found along the coast of Venezuela. Unfortunately, there is interbreeding between the breeds due to cage birds from, for example, Curaçao being released on Aruba. The parakeet population on Aruba is in danger due to extensive deforestation occurring on the island because of the growing population.

The prikichi weighs between 90 to 100 grams. It has a greenish-brown head with some yellow around the eye. The back and wings of the parakeet are dark green, and the underside of the body is a lighter shade of green. There is also a bit of blue in the wings. The parakeet's beak is gray/black.

Parakeets often use termite nests as breeding sites. Parakeets are found in all natural environments (mondi) of the island. It defends itself by flying away and loud cries. Parakeets eat seeds from the pods of the Kwihi tree, Divi Divi, and columnar cactus. They also consume natural fruits. Its main predators are boa constrictors, humans.

Coneu (cottontail rabbit, *Sylvilagus floridanus nigronuchalis*)

The Eastern Cottontail rabbit (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) was probably brought over to the island by Indian settlers thousands of years



ago as a source of food. This rabbit, locally known as Coneu, has spread all over the island and has become part of our ecosystem. The very adaptable Coneu can live in a wide variety of habitats, including Aruba's xeric scrublands, where it typically grazes on weeds and grasses.

The Aruban Coneu has a brownish grey color and a distinctive white belly. This white fur extends to the bottom of the tail which becomes visible as the rabbit runs. These rabbits can grow up to approximately 40 centimeters in length over their short lifespan of 3 years. Cottontail rabbits reach reproductive maturity when they are just 2 to 3 months old. A female rabbit, called a doe, finds a suitable nest spot under a shrub or rocks and lines it with fur. She can have an average of 3 to 4 litters per year averaging 5 young each. The doe only visits her young once or twice a day to nurse her babies for a period of 2 to 3 weeks. The young reach independence at 4 to 5 weeks. The Aruban Coneu is an en-

dangered species and protected by Aruban law. The Coneu is thought to have drastically declined due to an increase in human activities, habitat fragmentation and predation by the invasive Boa constrictor as well as feral cats and dogs. However, recently there seem to be more rabbit sightings in rural and wilderness areas and also in the National Park. This could be linked to a recent decline of the invasive Boa population after the long period of drought. As the Coneu can reproduce very quickly, a short break in predation pressure can lead to a fast increase of rabbits. These are but a few of Aruba's beautiful inhabitant, which we must all contribute to protect.



National Park Arikok: Aruba's biggest nature conservation

The National Park Arikok comprises almost 18 % of the island. Its rugged terrain, desert-like hills filled with tall cacti, breathtaking coastline and protected local flora and fauna welcome you to be explored. There are numerous animals to discover, for example the bright blue Cododo or mighty Warawara.

The national park Arikok takes you on a memorable journey of the island's past offering unique geological, cultural and historical sites. These can all be enjoyed and explored either on your own or during guided tours. A wide variety of educational and informative programs and fun activities is available.

Did you know that four of the seven species of sea turtle lay their eggs on Aruba's beaches? In the national park, a Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum*) keeps a strict eye on a very special event taking place below on the beach: A majestic Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) heading back to the ocean after laying her eggs during breeding season. Sea turtles prefer nesting in the cool and dark hours of the night. And hatchlings usually wait for the cue of cooling surface sand before emerging.

Nature Conservation
The protected area of National Park Arikok was officially established in 2000. Arikok National Park is a 34 square kilometers (7907 acres) of natural area, located at the north-eastern part of Aruba which contains examples of most of the island's flora and fauna against a backdrop of great geological complexity. We are proud to state that approximately 18% of the total land area of Aruba is assigned as a National Park, to protect and preserve the flora, fauna, geology and historical remains present within Arikok National Park.

The Landscape
There is a great geological variety within the park. The main aspects are the



rough hills of the volcanic Aruba lava formation, the mysterious rocks of the batholithic quartz-diorite/tonalite, and the limestone rocks from fossilized coral. The two tallest hills on the island are situated within the park. Jamanota hill 188 meters (617 ft) and Arikok hill 176 meters (577 ft), from which the name of the park is derived.

The line of the permanently wind-and-wave beaten North Coast is broken by several bays (boca's). Most of them are small yet impressive inlets at the mouth of dry riverbeds. Some of these bays (boca's) are spectacular sights, adorned with white, sandy beaches and sand dunes, as is the case at Boca Prins and Dos Playa.

Arikok is also home to Conchi, Aruba's most important natural attraction; also known as The Natural Pool. The journey to the Pool is and adventure by itself and only possible by foot, horse, or 4x4 vehicle. As of 2020, ATVs and UTVs are not allowed in the park due to its significant impact on nature.

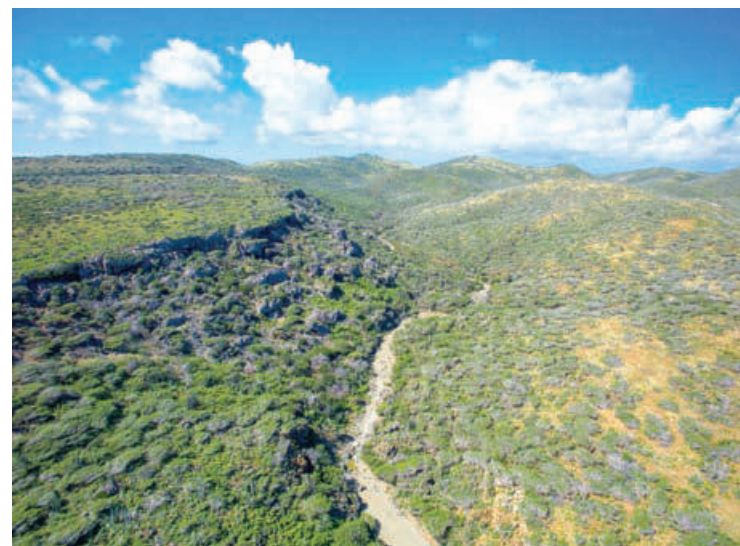
Cultural and Historical components
There are a number of sites within the park that attest to the history of Aruba. The

Caquetio Indians left rock paintings in Cunucu Arikok and Fontein Cave.

Old plantation (Cunucus) sites tell the story of an active yet challenging agricultural past.

These Cunucus were also residential areas for the few families that worked the land. These families found ways to survive in the difficult conditions, and were able to erect their homes with materials found in the area. Two of these adobe houses have been restored. Park rangers are learning many of the old building techniques in order to preserve this unique Aruban mud-house. At Cunucu Arikok and near Plantation Prins you can find these adobe houses.

Park Management
The Aruba Conservation Foundation (ACF), formerly known as Aruba National Park Foundation, manages the national park. This foundation was established in July 2003. In February 2017, mangrove and wetland RAMSAR site #198 Spanish Lagoon was annexed to Arikok National Park due to its importance as a feeding and breeding area for wa-



ter birds and as a nursery area for a variety of marine organisms. With this addition, the areas under management increased by 70 hectares while the amount of species of flora and fauna to be conserved to over 250. On December 21st, 2018 (AB2018 no. 77) Parke Marino Aruba – currently consisting of four marine protected areas (MPAs) – was officially established and subsequently brought under management of ACF. In 2019, preliminary management plan for marine were introduced for Parke Marino to conserve reefs, seagrass beds, and mangrove forests and in

2020 ACF was given additional management areas such as the Salinas (Druif, Malmok, Cerca, Palm Beach, Bubali etc.) and also additional areas such as Rooi Manonchi, Ser'I Teishi etc. Managed areas can be seen here: <https://acf.aw/>.

Visit the National Park Arikok to see the wonder of Aruba's nature. The visitor center in San Fuego and entrance in Vader Piet (San Nicolas) is open daily from 8:00 AM to 16:00 PM. Contact the ACF via e-mail, info@acf.aw or call +297 585 1234 for more information.

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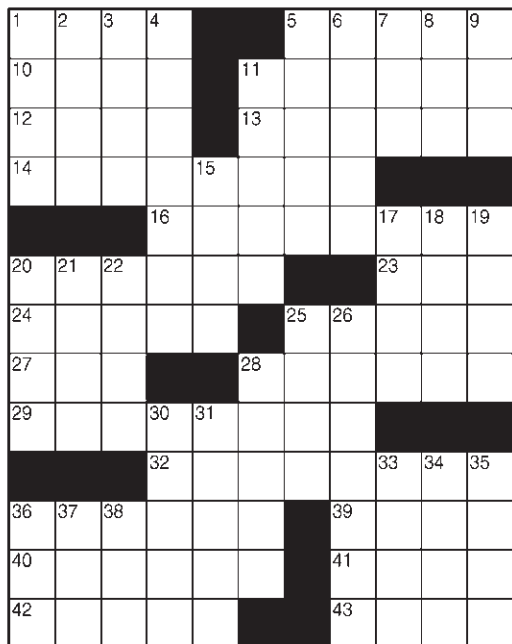
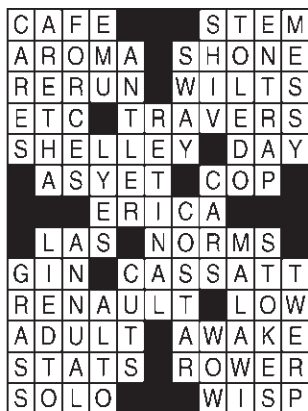
By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Borscht veggie
5 True
10 Different
11 Not round-about
12 Government agent
13 On cloud nine
14 Many a Manx
16 Table protector
20 Sign up
23 Injury soother
24 Track contests
25 Divine nourishment
27 Can. neighbor
28 Fat pig
29 Boater, e.g.
32 Booster of bad cholesterol
36 Shade trees
39 Valiant sort
40 Relaxed
41 Singer Redding
42 Brewing need
43 Bankrolls

DOWN

- 1 "Little Women" sister
2 Sailors' saint
3 Jacob's twin
4 Sawbuck
5 Sachet scent
6 Give a speech
7 Nonetheless
8 King's topper
9 British co. abbr.
11 Car sticker
15 Building wings
17 Stole stuff
18 Skin woe
19 Sign of sorrow
20 Aussie birds
21 High home
22 Bring up
25 Sound of agony
26 Gallery event
28 Aspect
30 One of the Titans
31 Take by force
33 Goat cheese
34 Like the
35 Throw
36 Spring month
37 Pigged out
38 Stew sphere



AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

3-9 CRYPTOQUOTE

SYV'GK AYZ ZY OVFD YTT

BPNTTL XPP ZIK ZNFK XHM

WVNPM SYVJ CNHAL YH ZIK

CXS MYCH. — JXS WJXMWVJS

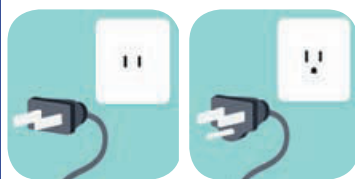
Cryptoquote: A GOOD WRITER POSSESSES NOT ONLY HIS OWN SPIRIT BUT ALSO THE SPIRIT OF HIS FRIENDS. — FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Cruise ship Schedule : Feb. 17 - 24 2026

			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
TUE	17	CARNIVAL HORIZON	08.00	22.00	B	1
		NORWEGIAN SKY	13.30	22.30	C	1
WED	18	SERENADE OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	C	1
		FREEWINDS	06.00	****	E	1
THU	19	AIDABLU	08.00	18.00	B	1
		MSC DIVINA	08.00	18.00	C	1
FRI	20	NORWEGIAN STAR	11.00	20.00	C	1
SUN	22	ISLAND PRINCESS	08.00	17.00	B	1
		EXPLORA I	08.00	18.00	C	1
MON	23	MARELLA DISCOVERY 2	08.00	20.00	C	1
		FREEWINDS - Dept.	****	22.30	E	-
TUE	24	OCEANIA INSIGNIA	08.00	17.00	B	1
		NORWEGIAN SKY	13.30	22.30	C	1
		OASIS OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	I	1

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic but important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.



Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.



Drinking water

The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.



Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourists that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occur, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

SUDOKU

To play sudoku, use logic to fill the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 only once. Puzzle difficulty increases from Monday to Sunday.

King Classic Sudoku



Difficulty: ★★★

2/26

Answer to previous puzzle

2	3	9	1	8	7	4	5	6
8	6	1	4	5	2	3	9	7
5	4	7	3	6	9	8	1	2
1	2	3	6	4	8	5	7	9
7	8	5	9	1	3	6	2	4
4	9	6	2	7	5	1	8	3
6	7	4	5	2	1	9	3	8
9	5	8	7	3	4	2	6	1
3	1	2	8	9	6	7	4	5

Difficulty: ★★★

2/25



A handout photo taken on June 20, 2011 and released on June 22, shows an Emperor penguin in New Zealand, some 3,000 kilometres (1,900) from his Antarctic home.

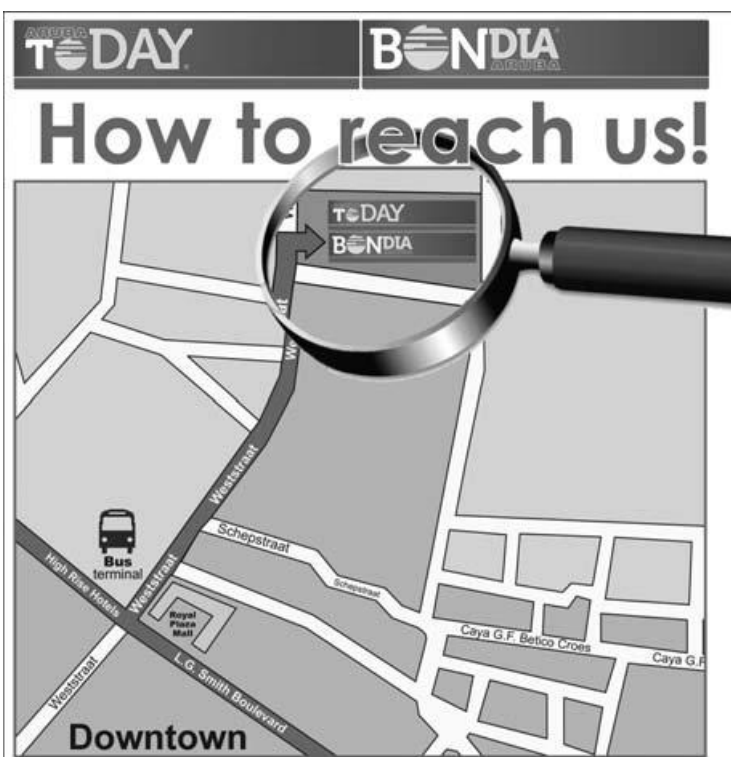
Ice melt threatens emperor penguins during annual moult: researchers

Paris, France

Emperor penguins shed all their feathers once a year, a precarious ritual that may have become deadly as climate change pushes them into shrinking patches of Antarctic sea ice, researchers said Wednesday. The flightless birds moult during summer, relying on stored fat to survive for several weeks until their waterproof coat grows back so they can swim and hunt in icy waters again.

Researchers from the British Antarctic Survey, analysing seven years of satellite images, accidentally discovered several moulting colonies along the extremely remote coastline of an area known as Marie Byrd Land. As sea ice melted, the penguins were forced onto smaller spaces in increasingly large and tightly packed groups, the UK polar research organisation said in a statement.

In 2025, only 25 small groups of penguins were visible in the satellite images, it said. Prior to 2022, more than 100 groups had been spotted in the same region. "While we don't know for sure what happened to those penguins, we know they can find new suitable breeding sites after ice loss, so it's possible they have established new moulting sites elsewhere," said Peter Fretwell, lead author and mapping expert at the British Antarctic Survey. "But also it's possible that huge numbers of penguins perished after entering the Southern Ocean before they had replaced their waterproof feathers," Fretwell said. □



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ARUBA TODAY NEWS

Newsom publishes memoir as he weighs 2028 U.S. presidential run

New York, United States California's Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom, a potential 2028 presidential candidate, published his memoir Tuesday in a step experts said was necessary before rolling out any future campaign. Such books offer "a sort of summary" of a potential candidate's view of the country and allow a politician to "sort of control" publicity outside of the normal news cycle, said Brian Arbour, a political science professor at the City University of New York.

Travis Ridout, a political science professor at Washington State University, said book tours "give potential candidates a way to campaign without really admitting that they are campaigning." Through a book, he said, politicians can "establish an official version of their background and experiences" and "make them seem credible" before a campaign.



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California Governor Gavin Newsom speaks to promote his book, "Young Man in a Hurry" at the Streicker Cultural Center, in New York, on February 24, 2026.

But Newsom insists that "Young Man in a Hurry," published a year late due to the January 2025 Los Angeles wildfires, is not "one of those political books that I wrote just to get it ahead of some cycle in the calendar year."

"It's not about the politician. It's about what shaped me the events, the travels, the setbacks, self-imposed and otherwise, the insecurities, the anxieties, the regrets," he said

at a promotional event in New York on Tuesday.

At 58 years old, the former mayor of San Francisco who built his career in wine-making and hospitality, reflects in the book on his dyslexia and his upbringing between a mother working multiple jobs and a father who was a judge close to some of California's wealthiest people.

Another potential presidential candidate, Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro, released his own book at

the end of January, while New Jersey Senator Cory Booker and Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear will do the same later this year.

- 'Fighting fire with fire' -

Speaking to several hundred New Yorkers at the event, Newsom said his book was not a "10-point plan for America's renewal."

He said Democrats were not taking enough action to win the argument against Republicans on

various issues.

"Sometimes we sit back, we're on our heels. We're not leaning in," he said.

"We just think the facts are going to bear up. We can win the argument. We can moralize this... That doesn't work anymore with Donald Trump, we have to fight fire with fire."

Samantha Reilly, a 58-year-old accountant from Long Island who attended the event, said she saw Newsom as a strong presidential candidate.

"He's vying for it. And yes, I think he would be a good prospect, actually. I love the way he took on Trump," she said.

The stops on Newsom's book tour also raised eyebrows among the experts who spoke to AFP. New York is a typical location, but Georgia, South Carolina and New Hampshire are less so.

Those states will be key in the primaries that decide who is the Democratic presidential nominee.

"Newsom might also want to show some appeal in the South, a region of the country in which a Californian might not seem a natural fit," said Ridout. □

New 'Resident Evil' bets on tried-and-tested formula

Paris, France

The ninth instalment of the zombie-blasting "Resident Evil" franchise set for release this Friday builds on the game series' 30-year

legacy of chilling horror and high-octane action. Available on PC as well as the PlayStation 5, Xbox Series and Switch 2 consoles, the latest in publisher



Visitors walk past a placard of Resident Evil Requiem video game of Capcom during the Gamescom video games trade fair at the Trade Fair Center in Cologne, western Germany, on the first day of the fair on August 20, 2025.

Capcom's flagship property goes back to its roots, drawing players into a story that will unveil a dark conspiracy in the fictional US town of Raccoon City. With dozens of games, remakes and spinoffs under the series' belt, "it was time... to go back to a very well-known setting", game director Koshi Nakamishi told AFP in August.

More than 200 people worked on developing "Resident Evil Requiem", which stars new protagonist FBI agent Grace as well as Leon Kennedy, a fan-favorite action hero. Creators alternated between oppressive first-person sequences, meant to underscore the char-

acters' vulnerability, and third-person action scenes. Meanwhile, the story progresses from a police procedural to the series' usual fare: a grand cover-up of a dangerous virus that transforms people into zombies.

The format has done well in the past, with more than 180 million copies of "Resident Evil" titles sold since 1996 according to Capcom -- making it by far the publisher's most lucrative franchise ahead of stablemates like "Street Fighter" or "Monster Hunter". "Resident Evil" is also returning to the silver screen with a feature film from American director Zach Cregger set for release in September. □

Trump to give top civilian honor to U.S. men's hockey goalie

Washington, United States — U.S. President Donald Trump said Tuesday he was giving the nation's highest civilian honor to national ice hockey team goalkeeper Connor Hellebuyck as he honored the squad at his State of the Union address to Congress.

The Presidential Medal of Freedom has been given to popes and political activists and also Olympic athletes in the past.

Trump's embrace of the men's team came as the women's side, which also won gold at the recently concluded Winter Olympics, declined an invitation to the speech.

"Here with us is a group of winners," Trump said as the hockey team entered Congress the players wearing their gold medals around their necks to chants of "USA, USA, USA!" "Great athletes have gotten that," Trump said of the award. "I thought he deserved it." Hellebuyck stood out in the men's 2-1 gold medal win over Canada with 41 blocked shots including a spectacular behind-the-back save.

The women's team said earlier Tuesday it had declined the invitation to the State of the Union, though Trump said in his speech they "will soon be coming to the White House."

A statement from USA Hockey, the sport's national governing body, sent to AFP Tuesday said the players were "unable to participate" in the State of the Union due to prior commitments.

Team USA's women's team won gold for the first time since 2018 when they beat the Canadians Thursday, also 2-1.

The US men's team followed that up Sunday with their own ice hockey gold for the first time in 46 years. In a video shared online soon after the win, Trump can be heard on speaker phone in a call with the men's team, inviting them to the address before saying: "We're gonna have to bring the women's team, you do know that?" to which the players laugh.



Members of the Team USA Men's Hockey Team, including goalie Connor Hellebuyck, wave to the audience as U.S. President Donald Trump delivers his State of the Union address during a Joint Session of Congress at the U.S. Capitol on February 24, 2026, in Washington, DC.

"I do believe I would probably be impeached" if he didn't invite them, the president added.

Some 20 members of the men's team arrived at the White House Tuesday afternoon, ahead of that evening's speech at the Capitol, wearing Team USA sweaters.

The statement on behalf of the women's team said: "We are sincerely grateful for the invitation," but that the players would not be attending "due to the timing and previously scheduled academic and professional commitments."

At least five members of the men's team also did not attend, according to U.S. media reports, with players saying they were heading back to their NHL teams for training. □



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Harden hails 'special' Cavs after emphatic win over Knicks

Los Angeles, United States
The Cleveland Cavaliers emphatically got back to winning ways Tuesday, coasting to a 109-94 victory over the New York Knicks as their recent star signing James Harden scored 20 points.

The Cavs took the lead barely a minute into the game with an Evan Mobley three-pointer, and never gave it up in a thoroughly comfortable night for the red-hot Ohio franchise. Former NBA Most Valuable Player Harden, who was

brought in from the Los Angeles Clippers this month, has never won a championship despite being one of the most decorated players in the league.

That was a key factor in his move to the seemingly playoff-bound Cavs, where he has only suffered one loss across seven games, and "The Beard" excelled again, providing four assists against the Knicks.

"We're working to build something special, and each game is an opportunity to get better," said Harden. "Tonight was a good step for us."

It was a return to form after their seven-game winning streak was snapped Sunday by the defending champions Oklahoma City Thunder.

Harden, 36, has given

Cleveland another strong offensive threat alongside Donovan Mitchell, who led the scoring with 23 points. The victory was underpinned by a powerful defensive performance, that saw the Knicks' star man Jalen Brunson restricted to 20 points.

"Tonight it was a team effort, and it's been like that since I've been here. That's one of the beauties about this team, any guy can get it going," added Harden. They drew level on 37 wins and 22 losses with the Knicks third in the Eastern Conference who were poor with their shooting accuracy, making just 11 points in a shocking third quarter.

Elsewhere, Anthony Edwards poured in 34 points as the Minnesota Timber-

wolves eamed a hard-fought 124-121 win against the Portland Trail Blazers.

Edwards -- MVP at this month's All-Star Game -- managed 25 of his points in an explosive first half.

The Charlotte Hornets beat the Chicago Bulls 131-99, with rookie Kon Knueppel racing to his 200th three-pointer.

Aged 20, the Hornets prodigy is the fastest player to reach that mark in NBA history, requiring just 58 games.

Tyrese Maxey sank 32 points plus nine rebounds and eight assists as the Philadelphia 76ers beat the Indiana Pacers 135-114.

The Pacers reached last year's NBA Finals, but have struggled badly this campaign, sinking to the very bottom of the East. □



Donovan Mitchell #45 of the Cleveland Cavaliers passes around Ogunbayi #8 of the New York Knicks during the second quarter at Rocket Arena on February 24, 2026 in Cleveland, Ohio.

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Jaguars to play two London games in expanded NFL global schedule

Los Angeles, United States

The Jacksonville Jaguars will play two games in London this year, the NFL announced Wednesday, as the 2026 season's expanded calendar of international games takes shape.

The Jaguars have played in London every year since 2013, with the exception of pandemic-hit 2020. This will be their first season with two designated "home" games in London.

Jaguars head coach Liam Coen, whose team hold the NFL's UK marketing rights, said "London is undoubtedly our home away from home".

"We have a passionate and knowledgeable fan base in London, built over time and still growing, and we're making a positive impact with fans throughout the United Kingdom as well," he said in a statement.

A third London game will feature the Washington Commanders. Two of the games will take place at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, with a third at Wembley. The 2026 season will feature an NFL record nine international games, across four continents, seven countries and eight stadiums. □



Brian Thomas Jr. #7 of the Jacksonville Jaguars celebrates after a touchdown during the second quarter in the AFC Wild Card Playoff game against the Buffalo Bills at EverBank Stadium on January 11, 2026 in Jacksonville, Florida.